

Sermon Acts 4 32 35 2nd Sunday of Easter Series B

Sermon: 2nd Sunday of Easter

Text: Acts 4:32-35

Theme: One heart and one mind

Goal: The resurrection of Jesus changes our behaviour and unites us to help others

Dear Friends,

Introduction: “He is risen!” – “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” These Easter greetings are still echoing in our ears. Easter is a daily reality, and not just an event which is over when the Easter eggs and chocolate are finished. We need to be aware of it, because the Easter gladness follows us each day of our lives. The fact that Jesus is alive and is with us, as we heard from the Gospel today, is a reality that changes our vision of the world and our behaviour, like it did with the disciples and with the first Christians, as our text tells us.

I – Witnessing the resurrection

“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.”

Thanks to the bold testimony of the apostles, the message of the living Christ reached us too and gives us hope. But not all believe, in spite of receiving the witness of the Christian Church. Thomas is a good example of how our human nature resists believing.

The story of St. Thomas is a beloved one for us, as our church is called “St. Thomas”. We identify ourselves with the doubting apostle and his weaknesses, and we confess with him: “My Lord and my God!”

The other 10 disciples had the exciting experience on Easter Sunday evening when they saw the resurrected Christ among them, sharing His peace with them and sending them with the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins, reconciling people with God through faith in Jesus. This encounter with the living Christ changed their lives

completely! From scared and afraid disciples locked behind doors, they became bold witnesses of the living Christ, facing even the threat of the Sanhedrin and of other enemies of Christ.

Thomas had missed the opportunity to see the living Christ that Sunday evening. He didn't attend that special meeting of the first Christians. This takes us to a reflection on what we miss when we don't attend the service if we are able to. We miss the presence of the living Christ in His Word and in His Sacrament, His Holy Body and Holy Blood. And this can cause doubts and may weaken our faith.

The very first one who received the bold witness of the other disciples was Thomas. "We have seen the Lord!" they told Thomas. But he didn't believe till Jesus appeared to him the Sunday after. – The disciples didn't stop witnessing of the living Christ and this happy message filled the entire globe! "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all."

II – One heart and one mind

This message of the living Christ didn't change the behaviour of the apostles only, but it caused a huge transformation among the first Christians; and it had an impact on the society as well. Our text says: "All the believers were one in heart and mind." - Can we say the same about us?

The Deceiver is always around to disturb the good witness of the Christians and to unsettle our unity. Paul wrote to the problematic congregation of Corinth: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be not division among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). – Jesus, knowing our weaknesses, remembered us in His long lasting prayer on Maundy

Thursday: “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their (the disciples) message, that all of them maybe one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:20,21).

Lack of unity and divisions in the church are bad testimony of our faith and of our hope in the resurrected Christ. Personal issues and selfishness should not hinder us to be “one in heart and mind”. The kingdom of Christ and the love of God are much more important than my opinion or preferences.

III –Sharing with the needy

How did the “one in heart and mind” show itself in the daily life of the first Christians? Our text explains it in a very practical way: “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. There were no needy persons among them.”

Selfish people don't like to share. They want more and more for themselves. But, you know, if someone accumulates millions and millions, at his departure he will not be able to take one cent with him. God makes us stewards of the possessions He gives us. Or, as a FELSISA study says, *we are just God's tenants and, as we grow in our faith, we ourselves will become better and better caretakers of the blessings God has entrusted us* (Church Councillors Meeting 2014, p.5). We will talk more about our responsibility as God's tenants this year, according to a proposal of our Synod.

The first Christian Church of Jerusalem had an interesting fundraising system: Some people sold some of the properties they had and gave the amount to the apostles to help the needy. – This is something similar to what I encouraged you to do at the AGM when we heard that our late brother Charles left a large amount to St. Thomas in his will. We can follow his good example. – Luther's Loot is another way to help the needy. We will not lack at home the food we bring here.

– And our regular Sundays and monthly offerings and donations, of course, is another way to accomplish this responsibility with God’s church.

The new life that the resurrected Christ brings had changed the behaviour of the first Christian to the point that “there were no needy persons among them”. But very soon the Deceiver put his dirty hands in what could have been the first *“Christian Communism”* as some like to call the life of the first Christians. The next chapter of Acts tells us of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the apostles when they sold their property and didn’t bring the full amount to be shared; and Chapter 6 tells about problems and envy among those who received the donations. Our sinful nature doesn’t allow us to live a perfect life at this side of heaven. But this is not an excuse for not trying to do our best. Stressed by the living Christ and by the hope of eternal life with Him, we try to be “one in heart and mind”, sharing with the needy what we have. This is our good witness in words and deeds that we love others as God loves us. This kind of witness of the first Christians brought many to the true faith in the Living Christ, so that “the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly” (Acts 6:7).

Conclusion: A Christian writer, *N. T. Wright*, argues passionately that *the Christians of today have so privatized Jesus and faith that they have forgotten that the early Church heard Jesus make radical claims upon their whole lives. They were not just privately Christians, but their faith affected the way they lived every facet of their lives, including financial, political, and relational.* – May God help us to live our faith in the resurrected Christ in such a way that all can “see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, 12 April 2015